NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5783 MAY 2, 1978
WAYNE COREY/BANGKOK

THAI-AMERICAN RELATIONS

ANNCR:

VICE PRESIDENT WALTER MONDALE ARRIVES IN BANGKOK THURSDAY (MAY 4) FOR TALKS WITH THAI LEADERS. VOA'S WAYNE COREY HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT ON RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THAILAND OVER THE YEARS.

VOICE:

THE AMITY WHICH CHARACTERIZES RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THAILAND TODAY IS DUE IN PART TO AMERICAN ACTIONS IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR. THAILAND, UNDER JAPANESE OCCUPATION, HAD DECLARED WAR ON THE UNITED STATES. BUT THE THAI AMBASSADOR THEN IN WASHINGTON, FORMER PRIME MINISTER SENI PRAMOJ, REFUSED TO HAND OVER THE FORMAL DECLARATION. INSTEAD HE CREATED A FREE THAI OVERSEAS RESISTANCE MOVEMENT.

WHEN THE WAR ENDED, SEVERAL COUNTRIES INCLUDING BRITAIN DEMANDED WAR REPARATIONS FROM THAILAND PARTLY TO COMPENSATE FOR THE DEATHS OF MANY BRITISH WAR PRISONERS WHO DIED WHILE FORCED BY THE JAPANESE TO BUILD THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI HERE IN THAILAND. BUT THE UNITED STATES OPPOSED DEMANDS FOR SIGNIFICANT WAR REPARATIONS SAYING THAT THAILAND UNDER JAPANESE RULE WAS NOT FREE TO FORMULATE ITS OWN POLICY. AT THE SAME TIME, THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR ASSIGNED TO BANGKOK IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE WAR WAS ENORMOUSLY POPULAR, AND THE STAGE WAS SET FOR SEVERAL DECADES OF CLOSE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THAILAND.

THAILAND SENT TROOPS TO JOIN WITH UNITED NATIONS FORCES IN THE KOREAN WAR. IT ALSO PROVIDED THE HEADQUARTERS FOR THE NEW DEFUNCT SOUTHEAST ASIA TREATY ORGANIZATION AND SIGNED A BILATERAL DEFENSE PACT WITH THE UNITED STATES. THEN, WHEN THE UNITED STATES

BEGAN ITS MILITARY BUILD UP IN SOUTH VIETNAM IN THE NINETEEN SIXTIES, THAILAND ALLOWED AMERICAN FORCES TO STATION BEE-FIFTY-TWO BOMBERS AND OTHER PLANES ON ITS TERRITORY.

AT THE END OF THE WAR IN INDOCHINA, KUKRIT PRAMOJ, THEN THAILAND'S PRIME MINISTER, ASKED THE UNITED STATES TO REMOVE ITS FORCES FROM THAILAND. HE FELT THEIR PRESENCE HERE MIGHT COMPROMISE THAILAND'S NEW POLICY OF TRYING TO DEVELOP FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH NEW COMMUNIST GOVERNMENTS IN INDOCHINA.

SINCE THAT TIME, AND IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY IMMEDIATE THREAT TO THAILAND, RELATIONS BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND BANGKOK HAVE FOCUSED ON BILATERAL ECONOMIC AND MILITARY AID. THERE HAS ALSO BEEN CONTINUING BILATERAL COOPERATION TO STOP THE FLOW OF ILLEGAL NARCOTICS OUT OF THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE -- THE AREA WHERE THE THAI, LAO, AND BURMESE BORDERS MEET. THE UNITED STATES HAS REPEATEDLY PRAISED THE THAI GOVERNMENT'S COOPERATION IN THE NARCOTIC SUPPRESSION CAMPAIGN.

CURRENTLY, THAILAND SEEMS UNCERTAIN ABOUT THE UNITED STATES WILLINGNESS TO PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC AND DIPLOMATIC ROLE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. IN RESPONSE, AMERICAN NAVAL SHIPS HAVE BEEN PAYING FREQUENT PORT CALLS AT PATTAYA ON THE GULF OF THAILAND, AND SENIOR AMERICAN OFFICIALS, INCLUDING DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE ROBERT OAKLEY, HAVE RECENTLY TRAVELED TO BANGKOK. VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE'S VISIT IS EXPECTED TO GIVE THE THAIS THE MOST EFFECTIVE ASSURANCE SO FAR THAT THE UNITED STATES RETAINS A KEEN INTEREST IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

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